

A report from your Legislature

State Representative **Mike Sells**

2006 SESSION REVIEW

Spring 2006

Dear Fellow Citizen:

The 2006 Legislature is history, in more ways than one. We adjourned this year's two-month session a day ahead of schedule, and I'm very happy to be back home!

Our primary mission this session was the writing of a supplemental budget. Frankly, there is a great deal to be said for the budget revisions we made for essential services and programs.

- Thousands more children in low-income families will receive health care.
- The new budget also bolsters support for senior citizens and disabled citizens.
- Significantly, we directed these and other important budget investments without resorting to any tax hikes.
- For every dollar in essential new spending, we set two dollars aside to cover unexpected economic problems down the road.

I look forward to hearing your comments and questions.

Sincerely,



Mike Sells
State Representative
38th Legislative District



Representative **Mike Sells**

Committee assignments:

- Higher Education & Workforce Education, Vice Chair
- Transportation
- Housing

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◆ College: Higher education should be open for more citizens

Unfortunately, access to higher education is becoming more of a problem for too many of our citizens. That is especially so for thousands of people who make their home in our own communities of Everett, Marysville and Tulalip. In fact, Snohomish County is one of the nation's largest counties by population that doesn't have a four-year, stand alone college or university of its own.

We've got to ask ourselves if we are serious about competing in today's economy. If we are, then we simply must expand access to higher education all across Washington, and especially here in the north Puget Sound area.

I prime-sponsored a bill aimed at making college a reality for more young men and women in our communities. Among other directions, this bill puts Everett Community College in charge of the North Snohomish, Island, and Skagit Counties Higher Education Consortium for developing four-year baccalaureate programs for a university center. In order to start meeting the higher education needs of our region, funding is provided for a minimum of 250 full-time, upper-division and graduate students by the end of June 2007.

It's more important than ever that citizens be assured a realistic opportunity to gain the education and training they need to help maintain a strong and vibrant economy. We need to be doing a better job keeping up with other states and other nations in terms of preparing citizens for careers in high demand areas.

I believe this bill answers some of that demand. It reflects the big need for more instruction in engineering, technology, education, environmental sciences, and nursing, as well as other health-care professions.

As Vice Chair of the House Higher Education & Workforce Education Committee, I'm proud of these new directions.

◆ Skills for today's economy ◆

Speaking of skills needed to survive in today's economy, I prime-sponsored another measure to re-emphasize engineering, technology, biotechnology, science, computer science and mathematics in each of our state's colleges and universities.

Our schools must encourage students to pursue engineering and science-related degrees. Businesses and industries are crying out for folks who possess these skills.



Students of all ages need instruction that works for today's skills and careers.

The problem is that our state ranks 34th per capita in the percentage of citizens who have earned a science or engineering degree. *Thirty-fourth!* The demand for these degrees keeps going up, but the number of Washington men and women who have one keeps going down. More and more businesses are calling for capable scientists, engineers and technology experts — and yet fewer and fewer Washington citizens are qualified to pick up the phone and answer that call.

Enrollment in engineering in the state's higher education institutions went down by 12 percent from the 1992-1993 school year to the 2002-2003 school year. Only about four percent of the total enrollment (which was just over 90,000 full-time students in the 2002-2003 school year) was in engineering and related technologies. About 17 percent of the total enrollment was in the sciences, and about three percent was in the field of computer science.

In those 10 years, the state's colleges and universities awarded 20,456 bachelor's degrees in all fields.

The number of engineering and related degrees went down by 8.6 percent since 1992-1993, falling to 4.2

percent. Only 1.5 percent of the total number of degrees awarded were in physical science. Only 4.6 percent were awarded in life sciences. And only 2.6 percent were awarded in computer science.

We need to help our colleges and universities prepare more graduates to fill high demand positions. Terms of my bill encourage schools to employ a variety of delivery models, including working to deliver degrees at branch campuses, and through other education or university centers.

◆ Help for every student ◆

The 2006 session also provided assistance for our local schools to make sure our young people meet new testing standards in the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (commonly called the "WASL").

Schools will have more resources to help 10th-graders struggling on a rough WASL road. Another key measure approved this year establishes alternate routes to graduation for hard-working students who have nonetheless failed the WASL twice.

Yes, I support rigorous testing as much as the next person. But I don't think these WASL tests (or any other exams) need to be so back-breaking and mind-bending that they stymie a young person's genuine progress.

◆ Jobs: Apprenticeships will be getting more attention

One of the most important measures we approved this session will expand opportunities for graduating high school students to enter into apprenticeships. This is the very innovative new "Running Start for the Trades" program.

"Running Start" at community colleges started 16 years ago. The program gives our high school students an option of attendance at select colleges in which they can earn both high school *and* college or university credits at the same time. This year, we asked, "Why not provide this same option for young people who are interested in entering a vocational or technical field?"

We answered with "Running Start for the Trades." **The bill we passed provides a greater link between education and the skilled trades.** It allows students to participate in programs that are already up-and-running.

The measure also helps solve our problem of providing for the increasing demand for highly skilled workers.

With many baby boomers retiring over the next several years, you can be sure that at least one gap will get a lot bigger. That's the gap between the demand for vocational and technical workers and the number of citizens prepared to fill those positions.



The construction trades provide excellent family wage jobs.

Our K-12 system tends to direct a lot of young people toward a liberal arts college education.

However, I don't want us to lose sight of the fact that we will always need men and women who know their way around the building and construction trades.

In other work-related legislation, we also approved a landmark compromise to reform our state's unemployment insurance system. Workers in need will receive

better benefits. Businesses will be able to count on a system that is both more affordable and more sustainable.



Working on legislation on the House floor with my colleague, Representative Larry Springer.

◆ Transportation: Safety, efficiency are re-emphasized

The supplemental transportation budget maintains our responsibility to ease traffic congestion in Snohomish County and in other fast-growing regions of Washington. We highlighted safety and efficiency in working toward doing a better job of moving people and products. A top transportation priority is to enhance the quality of life for families and build our competitive edge for businesses.

As a member of the House Transportation Committee, I have emphasized the importance of building a statewide system of multimodal transportation. We cannot afford to allow the transportation system to languish. Very few other aspects of daily living have as great an impact upon the business climate *and* the general convenience of our citizens.

The new budget funds 18 additional state troopers. We also fund road-safety projects, and strengthen Incident Response Team coverage for particularly hard-hit parts of Interstate 5 and other highways. Also, we stiffened sentencing for the most egregious drunken drivers.

This session, we found a compromise on the issue involving the Regional Transportation Investment District for our large Puget Sound counties. The agreement focuses on accountability and the close relationship that highways must maintain with our transit system.

The final legislation also included the ability to form local Transportation Benefit Districts to help solve local traffic problems on city and county roads.

A bill I prime-sponsored on this was merged into the final regional transportation proposal that passed the House and Senate.

◆ New and renewable energy ◆

A very important new “transportation” direction authorized this year establishes an **Energy Freedom Program** to promote new and renewable energy resources.



Improving our transportation system is pivotal both for our quality-of-life and for our economy.

millions of citizens spend billions of dollars on gas and diesel. Our nation and our own state are far too dependent on oil. It's bad for our health. It's bad for our economy.

We need to do a lot more work on getting away from dependence on oil — whether it's foreign or domestic oil. This legislation is fundamental for our health *and* for economic reasons. The United States used more than 19.6 million barrels of crude oil and other petroleum products every day in 2002. We used about a quarter of the total world oil production.

Year in and year out in the state of Washington, thousands of businesses and

As gas and other petroleum fuels have become more expensive, demand for biodiesel and ethanol has grown. This nascent industry will create more jobs, on top of improving our economy by helping us get away from fossil fuel dependence. Terms of this year's measure will establish low-interest loans and grants to local governments for research and development of alternative and renewable energy projects.

Developing alternative biofuel sources is an idea embraced by many Washington farmers. They recognize the potential economic benefit of growing new crops for the biofuel industry, as well as the environmental benefits. **Applications for financial assistance submitted for new energy projects would be reviewed against very specific criteria. The application must:**

- **Contribute to establishing a viable bioenergy-production capacity.**
- **Help Washington farmers.**
- **Conserve energy and reduce dependence on petroleum fuels and imported energy.**
- **Decrease air and water pollution.**
- **Create and improve the quality of jobs.**
- **Use private funds.**
- **Build a market for bioenergy.**

Biodiesel is a vegetable oil-based fuel. It can be burned in place of regular diesel or mixed in varying blends. Ethanol can be distilled from corn and grain and mixed with gasoline. Canola and other crops are reduced to oil in a crushing plant. The oil is then blended with diesel fuel to create biodiesel.